

REVIEW OF THE ESSENTIALS OF
CONDITIONING AND LEARNING
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Recently, a textbook on learning, behavior, and conditioning has been added to the market: *The Essentials of Conditioning and Learning* by Michael Domjan (1996). This text has 13 chapters that cover most of the common topics of conditioning and learning. Each chapter opens with a few “Did you know that . . .?” questions concerning misconceptions, interesting issues, or overlooked facts. Answers to these questions can be found from the materials presented in that chapter. In this way, the reader’s focus can be directed toward specific contents covered, and the reader also knows what to expect from the chapter.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce basic concepts, and chapter 3 begins the introduction of the most basic form of learning, habituation and sensitization. In the next two chapters, the author describes the fundamental processes of classical conditioning. Chapters 6 and 7 present the basics of instrumental and operant conditioning, with the theory of reinforcement discussed in chapter 8. Chapter 9 is dedicated specifically to extinction in both types of conditioning, and the effects of antecedent stimuli on instrumental responses and relevant theories are described in chapter 10. Chapter 11 focuses on avoidance learning procedures and theories, whereas chapter 12 presents a discussion on punishment and factors that influence its effectiveness. Finally, the book

ends with a description of major memory mechanisms (in chap. 13). Here, laboratory procedures, types of memory, and sources of memory failure receive a brief treatment.

The author states that the goal of this book “is to provide a concise, current, and sophisticated summary of the essentials of conditioning and learning for students and professionals” (p. xii) in psychology and allied disciplines. My impression from reading the book is that the author has been successful in meeting these objectives. In terms of number of pages, font size, and page layout, *The Essentials of Conditioning and Learning* has achieved the goal of conciseness. This book is a small volume compared with other learning and conditioning textbooks of the same coverage. Its main body (including glossary, references, and indices) consists of only 226 pages, whereas a similar book (the third edition of *The Principles of Learning and Behavior*) by Domjan and Burkhard (1993) spans 459 pages. However, there is a price to pay in reducing the length. Compared with other texts, the book contains relatively fewer citations of empirical studies, and the cited ones are described only briefly, although the author does suggest a few relevant readings at the end of each chapter.

The book also presents up-to-date materials by citing references to major recent works and current directions of investigation in the field of learning and conditioning. The behavior system approach (chap. 2) is a good case in point. Recent evidence has found behavior components other than appetitive and consummatory behavior in un-

Domjan, M. (1996). *The essentials of conditioning and learning*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

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conditioned behavior. The inclusion of this approach has highlighted the functional aspects of unconditioned behavior and opened up new avenues for interpreting existing findings. The author is successful in simplifying difficult concepts and presenting them in a systematic manner, thus enhancing the reader's appreciation and comprehension of complex issues in learning and conditioning.

A weakness in this book is the lack of sufficient treatment of some topics, even though conciseness is the goal. For example, choice behavior and concurrent schedules constitute an important area of inquiry in operant conditioning, but these are described only briefly in a few short paragraphs

(pp. 96–97, chap. 7). In addition, the book contains no specific chapter on theories of Pavlovian conditioning. Given its strengths, this book serves as an ideal supplement to other traditional textbooks for a course on conditioning and learning.

REFERENCES

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